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ABSTRACT

To address the need for special education teachers trained in rural and culturally diverse settings, a field-based special education program was implemented in Kayenta Unified School District (KUSD), Arizona, on the Navajo Nation. KUSD provided teacher housing, classroom space, sites for practicum coursework, and some student teaching placements. KUSD teachers and administrators were hired as instructors and guest speakers for some courses and were involved in the selection of participants. Northern Arizona University contributed tuition waivers and administrative support, and the U.S. Department of Education provided funding. Since 1992, 109 students have been admitted into the program, and 104 completed it; 67 students were Native American, primarily Navajo. The high retention rate was attributed to the field-based nature of the program. The Native American students were predominantly paraeducators for the KUSD and therefore were able to remain employed and maintain their residence in their home communities. KUSD administrators supported their paraeducators by releasing them from duties for professional development and other relevant program activities. Culturally and linguistically relevant curriculum was integrated in all coursework, and mentor teachers helped non-Native participants adjust into the community. Of the 78 program participants who graduated, 44 were Native American and 34 were non-Native, an unusually high rate for both groups. Fifteen former participants completed their master's degree in education. Most Navajo students remained in the area and secured teaching positions with KUSD. (TD)

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AN EVALUATION OF A DECADE OF A RURAL FIELD-BASED SPECIAL AND ELEMENTARY TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

A ten-year evaluation of the Rural Special Education Program and the Reaching American Indian Elementary and Special Educators Program will be outlined. These two field-based programs have resulted in the retention and preparation of numerous Native American and non-Native special educators in rural and multicultural settings.

A poll by the National Education Association indicated that schools needed more special education teachers than any other group of educators (National Education Association, 1992). This shortage has also been identified by numerous other individuals, groups, and organizations, including the Office of Special Education Programs (1997), United States Department of Education (1998), and the American Association for Employment in Education (1999). Even more pressing is the need for professionals in special education to serve culturally and linguistically different students (Baca & Cervantes, 1998). The National Center for Educational Statistics estimates that there are over 9 million school age students in the U.S. whose primary language is not English. "Recruitment and personnel preparation that includes teaching to standards, professional development, and retention are major concerns that must be addressed if we are to meet the challenges and expectation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997" (NASDSE, 2001).

To address this need, in 1992 the Center for Excellence in Education (CEE) at Northern Arizona University (NAU) in collaboration with the United States Department of Education and the Kayenta Unified School District (KUSD) implemented a special education field-based program in Kayenta, Arizona, located on the Navajo Nation. The program was originally called the Rural Special Education Program (RSEP). The two-semester RSEP program was especially designed to prepare both Native Americans and non-Native Americans to teach in rural and multicultural settings. In 1998 the program was funded for the third three-year cycle and renamed the "Reaching American Indian Elementary and Special Educators Program" (RAISE). The two-cycle, three-semester RAISE program was an expansion of the RSEP as it included the special education *and* the elementary education coursework required for teacher certification. Hereafter, the program will be referred to as the RAISE program, unless the writers are referring to the RSEP specifically. Since 1992, the student makeup of cohorts with the RAISE Program has varied each year. Nonetheless, the majority of the 104 (67 of 104) students who completed the RAISE program are Native American, primarily Navajo participants. Most of the RAISE participants were paraeducators who worked in inclusion classrooms in the KUSD schools. Nearly all of the Navajo students attended school in Kayenta and had been employed by KUSD for many years. Kayenta paraeducator participants were usually thirty to forty-year-old Navajo females who are married with two or more children. Given the responsibilities these students have in their community, many Navajo students found that the only way to obtain a degree was to participate in the RAISE program. On the other hand, the Flagstaff campus-based students moved to Kayenta for 18-months to participate in the RAISE program. Typically students recruited from the main campus were non-Native females in their early twenties who were following the traditional path towards an undergraduate degree and teacher certification. These students chose to participate in the RAISE program because of their strong commitment to multicultural special education.

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The first six years of the RSEP program did not include elementary education coursework and the student teaching that is required for graduation from the CEE teacher education program. Consequently, some participants of the RSEP were unable to complete the elementary education requirements due to the lack of financial assistance, distance from campus, or other constraints. Because of these constraints, the RAISE grant proposal was written to include the elementary education coursework. Therefore, most students who had not completed their elementary education requirements in the first two cycles of the grant had the option of completing their elementary education courses in the third cycle of the grant program.

Over the past decade of the grant 109 students were admitted into the program and five students did not complete the program. Two non-Native Students and three Native American students did not complete the program after being admitted. One of the three Native American students left the program for personal reasons and later returned to campus to finish her degree. The other four students (two non-Native American and two Native American) were asked to leave the program due to inconsistencies in their behaviors and the program goals. Of the 109 students 67 students were Native American, primarily Navajo and 37 students were non-Native students. The high program retention rate was attributed to the field-based nature of this program. The Native American students were predominantly paraeducators for the KUSD and therefore able to remain employed and maintain their residence in their home communities. Classes were offered in the evenings and KUSD administrators were supportive of the paraeducators in the program. They allowed the paraeducators to be released from duties for professional development and other relevant program activities. This administrative support was a critical variable to the success of this program. Culturally and linguistically relevant curriculum was integrated in all coursework. The paraeducators had opportunities to transfer what they learned from their courses to the classrooms in which they were assigned. Mentor teachers were available to the program participants and made a difference in the adjustment of the non-Native participants into the community. In addition, the project manager resided in the Kayenta community and was able to provide on-going support to all student participants. Table 1 highlights the retention status of program participants.

Table 1. Retention Status of Program Participants

TOTAL # of Students **ADMITTED** into the RSEP & RAISE Program	Native American Students	Non-Native American Students	TOTAL # of Students **COMPLETING** the RSEP & RAISE Program
109	67	37	104

The graduate status of program participants reflected in Table 2 was unusually high for both Native Americans and non-Native Americans. However, some of the participants decided they would rather remain in the position of paraeducator with KUSD than becoming fully certified teachers. Financial and location constraints may have remained an obstacle to some of the former participants due to the student teacher semester that was not included in the RAISE program. Tuition is high and the students often have to give up their paid positions at KUSD in order to complete their student teaching.

Table 2. Graduation Status of Program Participants

Total # Students Graduated	Native American Students	Non-Native American
78*	44	34

*Number includes eight participants student teaching in spring 2002.

However, an unusually high number (27) of former program participants had gone on to pursue their master's degree in education at NAU. As shown in Table 3, fifteen of these participants were successful in their pursuit and completed the requirements for the advanced degree. These former participants are providing needed services to our culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional students throughout the State. One former participant is currently the Director of Special Education for a Navajo Nation school. Another former participant is the only

Navajo in the state of Arizona who possesses a Master's degree in Deaf and Blind and is currently employed by the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind. And still another Native American student is currently in a doctoral program. Several other Native American students have inquired about doctoral programs and are at various stages of the application process. These numbers reflect NAU graduate coursework. There may be other former participants who are pursuing a master's degree at other institutions. Due to the increase in web-based and Instructional Interactive Television (IITV) courses, graduate work has become more accessible to the Native American students residing in rural and remote communities. NAU has extended its satellite campuses to every region of the State and students no longer have to rely on travel and traditional deliveries of instruction to complete their coursework.

Table 3. Status of Program Participants' Master's of Education

M.Ed. Completed	M.Ed. In Progress	M.Ed. Total
15	12	27

Table 4 highlights the benefits to KUSD discussed earlier. Twenty-six former participants are primarily Navajo and currently hold certified teaching positions in the school district. Nine of the former participants are providing direct services to children within the KUSD as counselors and paraeducators. KUSD assisted in the student teaching placement of the program's last cohort of eight students. When these eight student teachers complete their student teaching assignment, at least seven will be hired by the district to teach in the fall of 2002.

Table 4. Former Participants at Kayenta Unified School District.

Certified Teaching Positions	Providing Direct Services to Children (i.e., Counselors, Aides)	Student Teaching
26	9	8

Conclusion

This award-winning program (e.g., Arizona Teacher Education Award, ACRES Exemplary Program Award for Cross Cultural Services, NAU Outstanding Service to the Profession Award) could possibly be used as a model to address the needs in other rural and multicultural settings. A true collaborative partnership between NAU, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, and the KUSD had been crucial to the success of the RAISE program. The KUSD provided teacher apartments for the RAISE project manager and students recruited from the main campus. It also provided space for the RAISE classroom for the university courses. In addition, KUSD provided sites for the practicum coursework and some student teaching placements. KUSD teachers and administrators were hired as instructors and guest speakers for some RAISE courses and were involved in the interview and the selection of potential RAISE participants. NAU contributed tuition waivers for all coursework for the program. NAU also provided the necessary administrative support. The RAISE partnership had been mutually beneficial to NAU and the KUSD. Non-Native students learned powerful professional and personal lessons from the program. Students completed the program at a high rate, graduated from the CEE Teacher Education Program at high rates, and most Navajo students remained in the area and secured teaching positions with the KUSD. The RAISE program could not have been developed without the continuous federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education -- Office of Special Education & Rehabilitation Services.

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